MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL

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Via email only

Dear Euan

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING (ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT) (ENGLAND) REGULATIONS 2017

FORMAL SCREENING OPINION FOR ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT 'SCREENING' UNDER PART 2 REGULATION 6

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT: Erection of a new data centre comprising two commercial units (Sui Generis), with associated external plant, substations, boundary fencing, landscaping, highway access works and all ancillary infrastructure.

SITE LOCATION: Land off Bower Street and Ten Acres Lane, Manchester M40 2AF

SCREENING OPINION ADOPTED BY MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL

Following the submission of the request for a Screening Opinion for the above proposed development dated 17 August 2026, the Council has assessed the submission in respect of the above regulations in order to come to a formal EIA screening opinion.

In coming to a formal opinion on whether an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is required to support the proposed development, Manchester City Council, as Local Planning Authority, has considered the covering letter, supporting drawings and information submitted for the Council's consideration. The conclusion of the City Council as Local Planning Authority is that an Environmental Impact Assessment is required for the proposed development.

The EIA Screening process is used to determine whether the proposed development is likely to have any significant effects on the environment. The Council as Local Planning Authority have considered the proposal against the EIA Regulations and the response is outlined below.

The proposal type is listed in category 10 (b) 'Urban Development Projects' of Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (England) Regulations 2017. It is indicated that consideration should be given by the Local Planning Authority to the potential for significant effects on the environment where:

(i) 1 hectare of urban development which is not dwellinghouse; or
(ii) Development includes mor than 150 dwelling; or
(iii) The overall area of the development exceeds 5 hectares.

The Proposed Development exceeds the threshold specified in Schedule 2, Part 10(b) of the EIA Regulations, as the site area is greater than 1 hectare.

As such, the need for an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) depends on whether the proposed development is likely to give rise to significant environmental effects.

The Site

The site comprises vacant land located at the junction of Bower Street and Ten Acres Lane, with the Rochdale Canal forming its south-eastern boundary. The land comprises a combination of grass, shrubs and mature trees, with areas of hard standing across parts of the site.

The surrounding area is mixed in character, consisting of residential, commercial and industrial uses. A terrace of eight residential properties backs onto the site at the junction of Bower Street and Ten Acres Lane, with further residential properties located along Ten Acres Lane, Bower Street, Thompson Street, Limerstone Drive, Mansford Drive and Packford Drive. Commercial and industrial uses are situated to the north-east and south-west, including a small trading estate adjoining the site, whilst the Lowry Park Industrial Estate lies beyond the Rochdale Canal to the south-east.

The site does not contain any listed buildings or structures and is not located within a Conservation Area. The site is in Flood Zone 1.

The Proposal

The proposed development relates to the erection of a data centre facility consisting of two steel-framed commercial buildings with a combined gross floorspace of approximately 2,465 sqm, including associated external plant infrastructure. The development would provide accommodation primarily for data centre operations, together with ancillary office space, staff welfare facilities and customer-facing office accommodation.

The proposal includes the provision of 8 car parking spaces, including 1 accessible parking bay, together with 10 secure cycle parking spaces. Supporting infrastructure includes the installation of two substations and associated external modular plant equipment.

Access to the site would be via the widening of the existing access from Bower Street to provide enhanced vehicular and pedestrian access arrangements.

The proposal incorporates hard and soft landscaping throughout the site, including tree planting.

In design terms, the buildings would comprise a brick plinth at ground level with double-height cladding above. The principal elevations would feature projecting brickwork elements and glazed openings to provide natural daylight to the office accommodation. External plant equipment, including chillers mounted on a raised gantry would be screened through the use of living wall treatments, providing both visual and acoustic mitigation.

In determining whether the proposed development is likely to give rise to significant environmental effects, regard must be had to the selection criteria set out within Schedule 3 of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations.

Schedule 3 Criteria

In determining whether the proposed development is likely to give rise to significant environmental effects, regard must be had to the selection criteria set out within Schedule 3 of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations. Regulation 5(4) requires the relevant planning authority, when considering whether Schedule 2 development constitutes EIA development, to take account of the characteristics of the development, including its scale, design, use of natural resources, waste generation, pollution, risks to human health, and potential for accidents or disasters; the location of the development, including the sensitivity of the receiving environment, existing land uses, natural resources, designated sites, heritage assets, and populated areas; and the nature of any likely effects, having regard to their scale, extent, duration, reversibility, probability, cumulative impacts, and the potential for mitigation.

The criteria provides the basis for assessing whether the proposed development is likely to result in significant environmental effects requiring Environmental Impact Assessment.

Assessment

Given the nature of the proposal and the context of the site, a number of principal environmental effects have been considered, as outlined below.

Ecology

The site is not situated within or directly adjacent to any statutory ecological designations. However, it lies within 1km of Clayton Vale Local Nature Reserve (approximately 950m to the south-east) and within the Impact Risk Zone of the Rochdale Canal Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC), which is located approximately 2km to the north-east.

The Rochdale Canal SBI (Site of Biological Importance) adjoins the southern site boundary and Bank Bridge Meadow SBI is located approximately 890m to the south-east. Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Habitats, including Open Mosaic Habitat on Previously Developed Land and areas of Deciduous Woodland are also present within 1km of the site.

Notwithstanding the proximity of these ecological receptors, the submitted information indicates that significant effects are unlikely, due to the limited scale of the development, the urban nature of the surrounding area and the separation distances involved.

Whilst environmentally sensitive receptors exist in the wider area, the site itself is not considered to constitute a sensitive area and significant effects on designated ecological sites are not anticipated.

On this basis, the proposal is considered have limited ecological impact.

Air Quality

An Air Quality Assessment has been undertaken for the proposed data centre. The site is located outside any Air Quality Management Area and within a predominantly industrial area, with a limited number of nearby residential receptors.

The assessment found that baseline air quality is consistent with urban background conditions and below relevant air quality objectives. During construction, there is potential for temporary dust emissions. However, these would be short lived and can be effectively controlled through standard mitigation measures secured by condition, resulting in no significant residual effects.

During operation, the development is not expected to generate significant traffic movements or emissions. Emergency backup generators would operate only infrequently and would be subject to limited testing hours, ensuring any air quality effects remain negligible. The assessment also identifies no significant cumulative air quality impacts.

As such, air quality considerations do not indicate a need for Environmental Impact Assessment.

Climate Change

Emissions produced by demolition vehicles, plant and machinery are not likely to be significant in the context of overall emissions in Manchester and the wider area. The release of greenhouse gas emissions is not likely to be significant in the context of existing climatic conditions.

Noise and Vibration

The proposed development is not considered likely to give rise to significant environmental effects in respect of noise and vibration. Whilst the site is located in proximity to residential receptors, the principal operational noise sources, including external plant and occasional maintenance-related HGV movements, would be controlled through design measures to meet relevant noise criteria and are not expected to result in unacceptable impacts. Construction related noise, vibration and traffic effects would be temporary, localised and capable of being effectively mitigated through the implementation of Best Practicable Means and a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP). No significant cumulative effects are anticipated. Accordingly, the scale, nature and location of the development are such that significant effects on amenity or human health are not expected and an EIA is not required on noise and vibration grounds.

Daylight and Sunlight

A Daylight and Sunlight Assessment has been undertaken in accordance with BRE guidance. The site is bounded by residential properties to the north and east, with industrial development to the west and the Rochdale Canal to the south. The only

sensitive receptors are nearby residential properties located on the opposite side of Bower Street and along Ten Acres Lane.

The proposed development comprises two data centre buildings and associated infrastructure with a maximum height of approximately 11.1 metres. Whilst the introduction of built form would alter existing daylight and sunlight conditions, the assessment concludes that the scale, siting and massing of the development, together with the separation distances to neighbouring dwellings, are such that no significant daylight, sunlight or overshadowing impacts are anticipated.

No cumulative impacts have been identified and no specific mitigation measures are required beyond those incorporated into the scheme design.

Risk of Major Accidents

As with any development project, there is a risk of accidents.

It is considered however that if normal site management, best practice and health and safety protocols are adhered to, there is no reason to believe that there would be any disproportionate increase in risk to health and safety.

The proposal comprises a data centre facility with associated plant infrastructure, substations, parking and landscaping. The development does not involve the storage, handling or processing of significant quantities of hazardous substances and is not considered to be an inherently hazardous use. The operational characteristics of the development are typical of modern commercial and industrial facilities, with risks managed through compliance with relevant health and safety legislation, fire safety standards and building regulations.

The site is not situated within an area known to be particularly susceptible to major accident hazards and there is no evidence that the development would increase risks to surrounding land uses. Potential risks associated with electrical infrastructure, plant operation and fire are well understood and can be effectively controlled through design measures, maintenance regimes and operational procedures.

Accordingly, the proposed development is not considered likely to give rise to significant environmental effects in respect of major accident or disaster risk and therefore, does not require Environmental Impact Assessment on this basis.

Transport and Access

Whilst there would be a temporary increase in HGV movements associated with the proposed construction, the change to traffic flows is considered less than substantial and given the lower numbers to be employed, traffic impacts would likely be negligible.

A Transport Statement has been prepared in support of the proposed development. The site is considered well connected by walking, cycling and public transport, with bus stops and the Central Park Metrolink stop located within convenient walking distance. The surrounding highway network operates without significant capacity or road safety issues and is not considered a sensitive transport location.

The development is expected to generate low levels of traffic, with approximately 38 two-way vehicle movements per day, including only 2 HGV movements, and a maximum of

6 vehicle movements during peak hours. These movements would have a negligible effect on highway capacity or highway safety.

The proposed access arrangements have been designed to appropriate standards, supported by a Road Safety Audit with the proposal including cycle parking, EV charging infrastructure and a Travel Plan to encourage sustainable travel. A Construction Management Plan would manage transport impacts during the construction phase.

As such, the transport impacts are considered less than significant and do not indicate a need for Environmental Impact Assessment.

Archaeology and Heritage

The site is not within a defined conservation area and does not contain any listed buildings. The site is not situated within an area of archaeological or heritage importance.

The site has been subject to archaeological assessment and consultation with the Greater Manchester Archaeological Advisory Service (GMAAS) confirms agreement with the conclusions of the Desk Based Assessment (DBA) that any surviving archaeological remains are likely to be of low archaeological significance.

Whilst there is potential for previously unrecorded archaeological remains to survive beneath the site, GMAAS considers that the principal impact of the proposed development would arise during intrusive groundworks, which could result in the disturbance or loss of such remains. Areas of particular archaeological interest include evidence relating to historic water management features, such as the former canal channel, associated watercourses and culverts, together with any remains capable of enhancing understanding of the industrial functions of former buildings that occupied the site.

GMAAS has advised that any archaeological impacts can be appropriately managed through the implementation of a programme of targeted archaeological monitoring and recording (watching brief) during intrusive groundworks. This mitigation can be secured by an appropriately worded planning condition attached to any planning permission.

Ground Conditions

The site is not located within a sensitive area, groundwater vulnerability is low, and potential impacts associated with construction activities, including soil disturbance, dust generation and interaction with groundwater, would be localised, temporary and readily mitigated through standard construction and site management measures. No significant cumulative effects are anticipated. Accordingly, the nature, scale and location of the development are such that significant effects on land, soils, groundwater or human health are not expected, and EIA is not required on ground conditions grounds.

Water and Flood Risk

The site is situated within Flood Zone 1 with the site at low risk of flooding. The proposed development is not likely to result in significant effects on water resources, flood risk or drainage. A Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy will effectively demonstrate that surface water runoff can be effectively managed through sustainable drainage measures, attenuation and controlled discharge rates, ensuring no increased flood risk on or off site.

Any construction related effects, such as sediment runoff or accidental spillages, would be temporary, localised and controlled through standard mitigation measures. No significant cumulative effects are anticipated.

Finished floor levels are proposed to be set above surrounding ground levels, and exceedance flows will be managed on site. These measures would ensure that the proposed development does not increase flood risk elsewhere and remains resilient over its design life, including allowance for climate change

As such, the scale, nature and location of the development are such that significant effects on water resources are not expected.

Natural Resources

The proposed development would require the use of natural resources during both the construction and operational phases. Whilst construction related resource consumption is not anticipated to extend beyond localised effects, the scale and nature of the proposed data centre raises wider questions regarding long-term resource use, particularly in relation to water and energy consumption.

In respect of water resources, the proposed data centre has been designed to utilise dry mechanical cooling and closed-loop cooling systems, which significantly reduce operational water requirements when compared to facilities relying upon evaporative cooling technologies. Notwithstanding these design measures, the development would still require a substantial initial commissioning fill of approximately 300,000 litres of water across the two buildings, together with ongoing water demand associated with maintenance activities, welfare facilities and periodic system management.

Whilst it is acknowledged that the applicant anticipates a negligible impact on water usage, the proposed development represents a large-scale, long-term operational use. Given increasing pressures on water resources arising from climate change, population growth and competing demands on regional water infrastructure, there remains uncertainty regarding the cumulative implications of the development's water requirements over its operational lifespan. These effects should be considered in conjunction with uses within the wider area.

In terms of energy consumption, the proposed development would generate a substantial and continuous demand for electricity throughout its operational life. Whilst the applicant has demonstrated a commitment to energy efficiency through the adoption of a target Power Usage Effectiveness (PUE) of 1.18, high-efficiency liquid cooling systems, free-cooling technologies and rooftop solar photovoltaic generation, the facility would nevertheless remain a significant consumer of electrical power. The scale of demand associated with modern data centre operations has the potential to place pressure on the local and regional electricity network and may require reinforcement of supporting infrastructure.

Further, the indirect environmental impacts arising from energy generation, transmission and associated carbon emissions require careful consideration. Whilst operational efficiencies may reduce energy use relative to comparable facilities, the absolute level of electricity consumption is likely to remain substantial due to the nature of the proposed use. There is therefore potential for effects relating to energy infrastructure, climate change objectives and cumulative resource demand that extend beyond the site boundary.

Given the scale of the proposed development, together with the uncertainties surrounding long-term water resource requirements, electricity consumption, infrastructure capacity and cumulative effects, it is considered that significant environmental effects cannot be ruled out at this stage. Accordingly, these matters are considered capable of giving rise to significant effects under the EIA Regulations and warrant detailed assessment through the preparation of an Environmental Impact Assessment. Such an assessment should evaluate the direct, indirect and cumulative effects of the development on water resources, energy infrastructure, climate change and the sustainable use of natural resources.

Socio Economic

The proposed data centre is located within an established economic centre with a strong labour market, infrastructure network and growing digital sector. The development would generate a limited amount of employment, indirect jobs investment and economic activity during both the construction and operational phases, providing positive benefits to the local and regional economy.

The site is not located within a socio-economically sensitive area and is not expected to result in the displacement of businesses, significant pressure on housing or community infrastructure, or adverse effects on local communities.

Having regard to the scale, nature and location of the development, socio-economic effects are expected to be predominantly beneficial, localised and proportionate. Accordingly, significant environmental effects are not anticipated, either individually or cumulatively.

Townscape and Views

The site does not fall within any landscape designation and there no protected or significant views within the site.

The proposed data centre is located within an established industrial and commercial area, characterised by warehouses, light industrial units, hardstanding and associated infrastructure.

Visibility of the development would be largely limited to the immediate surrounding area, including sections of Bower Street, the Rochdale Canal towpath and nearby commercial premises. Longer distance views are constrained by the existing urban form. Whilst the development would introduce new built form, its scale, appearance and function would be consistent with the prevailing industrial character of the area.

Whilst the proposal would inevitably impact views in the immediate area, the impact is not considered significant in the context of the existing environment.

Conclusion

Whilst the proposed development would give rise to some temporary and localised environmental effects during the construction phase, these effects are not, in themselves, considered likely to result in significant long-term environmental harm.

However, unlike other environmental topics assessed, there remains a degree of uncertainty regarding the long-term operational impacts associated with the proposed data centre's demand for water and electricity. Whilst the submitted information outlines measures intended to minimise resource consumption, the development would nevertheless represent a substantial and continuous operational use with potentially

significant requirements for utility infrastructure over its lifespan. Given the scale of the proposal and the evolving nature of data centre operations, it is not currently possible to conclude with sufficient certainty that the long-term effects on water resources, electricity networks and associated infrastructure would be insignificant.

Further, the potential cumulative effects arising from increasing demand for water and energy, when considered alongside other existing and proposed development within the wider area, have not been fully assessed. There is also uncertainty regarding the resilience and capacity of utility networks to accommodate future operational requirements, particularly in the context of climate change, increasing resource pressures and the transition towards net-zero carbon objectives.

In view of this uncertainty, it is considered that significant environmental effects cannot be ruled out in relation to the development's long-term water consumption and electrical demand. These matters have the potential to extend beyond the application site and may give rise to indirect and cumulative impacts on natural resources, utility infrastructure and climate change objectives.

Accordingly, having regard to the characteristics, scale and operational requirements of the proposed development, it is considered that the proposal has the potential to result in significant environmental effects within the meaning of the EIA Regulations. It is therefore the opinion of the City Council, as Local Planning Authority, that an Environmental Impact Assessment is required in order to fully assess the direct, indirect and cumulative effects of the development, particularly in relation to long-term water resource consumption, energy demand, infrastructure capacity and associated environmental impacts.

This screening opinion relates to the requirements of an Environmental Impact Assessment only.

I trust this information is of some assistance to you. If you require anything further, please do not hesitate to contact Steven McCoombe via the details provided at the head of this letter.

Yours sincerely



Jennifer Connor
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